

**War in Ukraine**

## Western pleas over Ukraine fail to sway African and South American leaders

US and European leaders struggle to convince rest of world that Russia's invasion is a threat to all



US vice-president Kamala Harris told the Munich Security Conference that 'no nation is safe' in a world where 'one country can violate the sovereignty and territorial integrity of another' © Wolfgang Rattay/Reuters

**Laura Pitel** and **Guy Chazan** in Munich YESTERDAY

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Western leaders used an important security meeting in Munich to make the case that Russia's invasion of Ukraine posed a threat not just to Europe but to the whole world. There was little evidence their message got through.

Speaking at the Munich Security Conference, a clutch of senior US and European officials sought to convince the rest of the world of the threat posed to them by President Vladimir Putin's invasion — and show them that blame for higher global food and energy prices lay with Moscow.

US vice-president [Kamala Harris said](#) "no nation is safe" in a world where "one country can violate the sovereignty and territorial integrity of another".

French president Emmanuel Macron said the "neocolonial, imperialist" Russian invasion was not "only a European war". German chancellor Olaf Scholz said it would be everybody's problem if "the law of the strongest prevailed in international relations".

Yet their attempts to portray the war in universal terms met some familiar retorts.

Brazilian foreign minister Mauro Vieira said that the conflict was a “very sad situation” and stressed his government “deplored” invasion.

But, in a message that jarred with the stance of western attendees calling for resolve to fight a long [war in Ukraine](#), Vieira added: “It’s been one year now. We have to try to build the possibility of a solution. We cannot keep talking only of war.”



Left to right: French president Emmanuel Macron, Polish president Andrzej Duda and German chancellor Olaf Scholz address the media at their bilateral meeting © Johannes Simon/Pool/EPA-EFE/Shutterstock

Organisers of the annual gathering in the Bavarian city were proud that this year’s event had a record number of participants from countries in what they termed the global south, even as it remained dominated by officials from Europe and the US.

There was palpable frustration among some leaders from African and South American nations that the war in Ukraine, which on Friday will enter its second year, was consuming the time, money and attention of the west at the expense of other pressing problems.

Francia Márquez, the vice-president of Colombia, said that her country wanted Europe’s help tackling the fallout from climate change and protecting the Amazon rainforest. “We don’t want to go on discussing who will be the winner or the loser of a war,” she said. “We are all losers and, in the end, it is humankind that loses everything.”

Namibian prime minister Saara Kuugongelwa-Amadhila was asked why her country had — along with China, India and 32 other nations — abstained from a UN resolution in October that saw 143 countries declare the Russian annexation of several Ukrainian regions as illegal.

She said that Namibia was focused on “resolving the problem, not on shifting blame”. She added: “The bottom line is that money used to buy weapons would be better used to promote development in Ukraine, in Africa, in Asia, in the EU itself where many people are facing hardships.”

Western officials said bilateral meetings on the conference sidelines revealed a much greater preoccupation with issues such as inflation, debt, higher energy prices and food security than with the war in Ukraine. There was also a lingering resentment, they said, over the west’s disappointing record on sharing coronavirus vaccines and compensation for the damage caused by climate change.



Christoph Heusgen, chair of the Munich Security Conference, delivers his closing statement on Sunday © Sven Hoppe/dpa

EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell acknowledged the west’s problematic past, citing European colonialism in Africa and western support for dictatorships in Latin America in a speech on Sunday. “People have memory and people have feelings,” he said. “We have to engage more, showing that we are defending universal values.”

Comfort Ero, president of the conflict prevention organisation Crisis Group, welcomed what she said was the “significant effort” by the west to respond to criticism that it was putting other countries through “a loyalty test” on Ukraine and

criticism that it was putting other countries through a loyalty test on Ukraine and failing to listen to their concerns.

“Talking is important. Listening is important,” she said. “The key will be how does that translate into actual policy engagement and practical outcomes.”

Ero added that it was important not to lump countries together, pointing out that, while South Africa had abstained from last year’s UN vote on the Russian annexations, Ghana and Nigeria were among a string of African nations that voted in favour of it.

[China’s stance on the conflict](#) loomed large over the Munich gathering along with tensions between Beijing and Washington. Amrita Narlikar, president and professor at the Hamburg-based German Institute for Global and Area Studies, said that European and American officials needed to do better in countering what she called China’s “very clever” framing of itself as a part of the developing world, where it promotes itself as a partner to help nations safeguard their sovereignty and boost development.

Narlikar said a peace plan for the Ukraine conflict that [Beijing had promised to publish](#) in the coming days — drawing scepticism from European and US officials — would probably target not just the west. “Equally importantly, the global south can be expected to be the audience,” she said.

“If China were to present its vision as one of a peace dialogue between Russia and Ukraine, and emphasise the global economic costs of a long-drawn war, this would enjoy considerable support in large parts of the global south.

“The west needs to get its act together and build more inclusive and winning narratives,” she added.